

Environmental topics for students

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Kids: Things you can do for the air we breathe

Smog is that brownish haze you see overhead on warm, sunny days. It's a combination of the words smoke and fog. It's formed when gases and fine particles react in the presence of sun and heat.

Smog is made up of a lot of pollutants. Most harmful to our health and to the natural environment are those that come from cars, trucks and machines that run on fuels like gasoline. Chemical sprays, oil-based paints, wind-blown dust and other airborne fine particles from factories and construction sites add to the problem.

When you hear a smog alert on the radio or television, that means we're all in for a bad air day.

High levels of smog can make your eyes itchy, your nose and throat feel sore, and your breathing heavy, especially if you are very active outdoors. If you already have asthma, bronchitis or allergies, it can make these conditions worse.

The Ontario government, other governments and many environmental organizations, are working hard to make our air cleaner. But we all have a part to play. Here are some things you can do every day for the air we breathe:

1. Walk or ride your bike to school

Don't ask to be driven places if it's not really necessary. Walk or ride your bicycle. Invite your parents along. It's great exercise. Exhaust emissions from cars, trucks and buses are what cause a lot of our smog. The more vehicles we can keep off the roads, the better our air will be.

2. Encourage your family to drive clean

Help to organize a car-pool to get to and from sports and other activities and events. Remind your parents to get the car tuned regularly. A well-tuned car runs better and pollutes less. It also costs less to run. Ask your parents to turn off the engine instead of idling while waiting to pick you up. Tell them that one minute of idling uses up more gas than re-starting the engine.

3. Turn off the lights

Generating electricity contributes to smog, so remember to turn off the lights when you leave a room. And turn down the air conditioning too, especially if your whole family is going to be out all day.

4. Avoid chemical sprays and cleaners

Hair and bug spray, air fresheners and even nail polish remover contain chemicals that add to air pollution. Suggest to anyone in your family who uses these products that they could use roll-on deodorants, creams, sticks and non-aerosol products instead.

There are some special things to remember on smog alert days:

1. Stay Indoors after mid-day

Air pollution levels are highest in the late afternoon or early evening. This is the worst time to participate in sports and strenuous exercise. Plan indoor activities like doing your homework, playing a board game or watching a movie. If you must be outdoors, stay away from high traffic areas, especially during rush hour.

The Green Club

2. Ask smokers to butt out

Smoking is not only harmful to your health, but contributes to air pollution. On bad air days, cigarette smoke combined with the already poor air quality can trigger asthma and allergies even more quickly. Ask family members or visitors to kindly refrain from smoking.

3. Mow the lawn another day

Did you know that the small gasoline engines in lawn mowers and leaf blowers pollute the air as much as some cars? If mowing the lawn is one of your chores, explain that doing it on a bad air day will only make the existing smog worse. Ask to do it another day.

4. Don't use the BBQ so much

Burning any fuel adds to smog, so why not suggest to your family that instead of using the BBQ you eat salads and other cold foods – perfect for a hot summer day!

For further information contact:

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